Hearings on Dodd Begin Today

By John H. Averill
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The Senate Ethics Committee will wind up a four-month investigation today by beginning its long-awaited hearings on misconduct charges against Sen. Thomas J. Dodd (D-Conn.)

The first few days of the hearings will be closed to the public. The committee plans to conduct the initial phase of the hearings in executive session while it irons out such housekeeping problems as the sequence of witnesses to be called.

Committee sources said they hope the hearings can be opened to the public before the end of the week. The ethics panel has adopted a rule barring televising of its public hearings.

When the hearings are made public, they will mark the debut of the committee, whose formal title is the Senate Select Committee on Standards and Conduct.

Created in 1964

The committee was created by a conscience-troubled Senate in July, 1964, in the wake of the scandals involving Robert G. (Bobby) Baker, the former secretary to the Senate's Democratic majority.

It was a full year after that before Senate leaders got around to naming the three Democrats and the three Republicans who comprise the bipartisan committee and so far the panel has never met in public session.

The hearings also will mark the first time in 12 years that a Senate committee has sat in judgment on a fellow Senator. The last such incident was in 1954 when a special committee was named to investigate charges that the conduct of the late Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) had brought the Senate into disrepute. Those hearings resulted in the Senate condemning McCarthy.

What the committee will do with Dodd is something only time can tell. Grave charges of misconduct have been leveled and if the committee concludes Dodd is guilty it would be hard pressed to avoid recommending censure.

Asked Probe

Dodd insists he is innocent and, in fact, he was the one who asked the ethics committee to look into the allegations made against him by syndicated columnists Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson.

Among other things, Dodd has been accused of:

- Performing unethical favors for Julius Klein, a Chicago public relations man and registered foreign agent for various West German business interests, and accepting expensive gifts from Klein.
- Diverting up to $200,000 dollars in political campaign contributions to his personal use without paying income taxes on the funds.
- Accepting favors from life insurance firms he was empowered to investigate.

The ethics committee is known to have looked into each charge Pearson and Anderson have made against the Connecticut Democrat. But at the outset, it is confining its hearings to Dodd's relations with Klein.

The committee, one of the most tight-lipped groups on Capitol Hill, has consistently refused to say whether it later will expand its hearings into other areas. It has dropped some broad hints that it will.

The committee seems acutely aware of the cries of "whitewash" that followed the Senate Rule Committee investigation of the Baker case and has given every indication it wants to escape similar criticism.